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ABSTRACT

Developed by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, this manual provides Child Protective Service (CPS) supervisors with a conceptual framework for practice and offers specific practice-oriented advice on how to effectively carry out supervisory functions. The manual focuses on building a foundation for effective service delivery, the role of supervision in a CPS unit, skills and techniques for supervising CPS workers, and information and abilities needed to cope with special staff needs in a CPS environment. A self-checklist designed to help supervisors determine whether they are working effectively is appended, and a one-page bibliography is attached. (MP)

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SUPERVISING CHILD PROTECTIVE WORKERS

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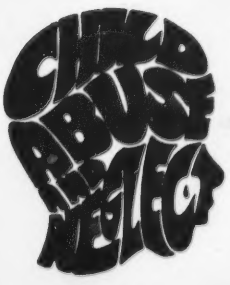

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SUPERVISING CHILD PROTECTIVE WORKERS

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PREFACE

The Child Protective Service (CPS) unit, as part of the public social service agency, is the key agency in each community's child abuse and neglect response system. It differs from other providers of human services in that it provides an "involuntary" social service. It has the legally mandated responsibility for ensuring that preventive, investigative, and treatment programs are responsive first to the needs of abused and/or neglected children and then to the needs of their families. Supervisors in the CPS unit play a key role in the effectiveness of the delivery of protective services.

In large social service agencies, as in most other complex organizations, the role of line supervision is critical. It is the line supervisor, after all, who is closest to "the action" and who bears the day-to-day responsibility for ensuring that the operational objectives of the organization are achieved. The operational objective of a social service agency is to provide high quality services to clients. Within this framework, the supervisor's first concern is to provide quality supervision.

There are certain basic functions that supervisors must perform in any setting. All of the activities of the CPS supervisor fall within four general categories: administration, teaching, monitoring, and provision of support. Because child protection is a specialized, intensive, emotionally draining service, there are some special needs that require the CPS supervisor's attention. The CPS supervisor must deal with such issues as authority, morale, and client resistance. Supervisors in all settings are responsible for worker growth and for dealing with problem workers, but CPS supervisors must also be familiar with steps for preventing worker burnout. Further, the controversial context within which child protective services are often provided adds to the supervisor's responsibilities.

This manual has been developed by the National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect to provide CPS supervisors with a conceptual framework for practice and to offer specific practice-oriented advice on how to carry out supervisory functions effectively. This manual focuses on building a foundation for effective service delivery, on the role of supervision in a CPS unit, on skills and techniques for supervising CPS workers, and on information and skills needed to cope with special staff needs in a CPS environment.

I

DEVELOPMENT OF A FOUNDATION FOR EFFECTIVE SERVICE DELIVERY

The CPS supervisor must first build a foundation within the confines of the social service agency, from which child protective services can be provided. This entails selecting qualified staff, setting standards and guidelines, and developing an organizational structure within the unit which will maximize effective service delivery. It is necessary for staff to receive an orientation to the agency procedures and specific training in child maltreatment. Once this base has been established the CPS supervisor can utilize specific supervisory techniques and skills in order to help workers provide protective services.

STAFF SELECTION AND RECRUITMENT

In social service agencies, most of the work of the organization is done by means of staff-client interactions. Because this work is not amenable to direct observation, one of the central features of the supervisor's role must be the recruitment and selection of qualified staff. Agencies may vary in their policies with respect to staff recuitment and selection, and often the supervisor in a large highly bureaucratized agency will not have exclusive or even primary authority in this area; sometimes the supervisor will not have *any* authority for staff recuitment or selection.

Nevertheless, whoever hires staff must be familiar with recognized criteria for selecting qualified staff and must be able to elicit information from candidates that will provide a reasonable basis for selection. The criteria used for selection should be more stringent than formal position descriptions and agency minimum standards regarding education and experience.

The following is a list of desirable characteristics for CPS workers:

- A personal commitment to the concept and process of CPS intervention
- Self-confidence and assertiveness
- A "can-do" attitude coupled with perseverance, initiative and adaptability

- Background in child welfare services
- Skills in individual, family and group counseling
- Knowledgeable in child development
- Flexibility in dealing with resistant clients
- An ability to be empathetic, understanding and objective
- An ability to see the family unit as the target client and to develop services that support the goal of preserving the integrity of the family
- An ability to work with professionals in other disciplines while maintaining personal professional identity
- An ability to be an advocate for the client by articulating the needs of the client to other agencies and assisting the client within the human service delivery network
- Strong professional ethics that respect and protect the rights of clients.

Under no conditions should personnel within the social service agency be involuntarily transferred into CPS.

ORIENTATION

Once staff have been selected, the supervisor must provide each employee with appropriate orientation to the agency, to the unit, to the particular position, and to community resources. An essential step in the orientation of new workers is the provision of training specific to the problem of child maltreatment.

Often, the supervisor will be assisted by other sources in orienting the new worker to the work environment, the particular position, community resources, and to specific information related to the problem of child maltreatment. The other sources which may assist the supervisor in this process are a training unit within the agency or an agency manual of policies and procedures. The supervisor, however, still must take primary responsibility for interpreting policies and procedures and helping the worker understand what are often general agency standards.

Frequently, new CPS workers do not receive any orientation on the dynamics of abuse and neglect in families. Supervisors should take advantage of any resources that are available to remedy this problem; for example, local, statewide or regional conferences, workshops or seminars. As an alternative, supervisors might develop an inservice training program which would include, relevant audio-visual materials and presentations by experienced CPS workers and/or knowledgeable professionals in the community. In addition to these resources, CPS supervisors should provide new workers with reading material applicable to the problem of child maltreatment.

Pairing a new worker with an experienced one is also an effective method of orientation. This allows the new CPS worker to observe some successful techniques for providing child protective services.

STANDARD SETTING

A crucial step in building a foundation for effective service delivery is the establishment of specific standards with regard to the quantity of work that CPS workers are expected to perform and the quality of that work. Supervisors must translate agency policy and procedures into operational guides to behavior that will be consistent with the standards but adapted to the realities of the day-to-day provision of services, often to too many clients with too many problems.

In addressing this task, the supervisors must assume a mediating role between the agency and the individual workers. As mediators, supervisors sometimes either set realistic standards that recognize the lack of resources but are not consistent with agency standards, or set standards that comply with agency standards but are impossible goals for the worker. One of the roles of the supervisor, then, is to define the standards for workers in such a way that the expected performance is consistent with the agency's organizational goals and ideals without setting goals the workers cannot realistically accomplish.

In order to fulfill this function satisfactorily, the supervisor must do several key things:

- Establish workload standards that are reasonable given the available resources (the Draft Federal Standards for Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention and Treatment Programs and Projects set guidelines for treatment staff caseloads that provide for one treatment worker to every 20 to 25 cases and one supervisor to every 5 treatment workers.)

- Provide a model of commitment to hard work and excellence that workers can emulate

- Establish organizational supports that aid workers in carrying out their workloads efficiently

- Recognize the rights of clients to receive timely and adequate services.

Standards, as they relate to the quality of social services, are sometimes considered to be very individualistic. This is because the services required by one client will differ markedly from those required by another client. Thus, each client may require a different response from the worker. While this is true to an extent, it is important to understand the commonalities which identify high-quality services and to emphasize these through supervision. The case-specific differences will be only too clear.

High quality child protective services are characterized by several elements:

- Immediacy of the response to incoming reports of suspected child maltreatment

- Recontacting the reporting source for further background information

- Intensity of the contact between the client and the worker throughout the CPS process

- Treatment of client as an individual in accordance with the values and ethics of the social work profession

- Mutual agreement between worker and client on the focus of joint efforts and intended outcomes (Efforts may be worker directed initially but should gradually become client directed.)

- Planned, time-limited activities by worker and client

- Activities carried out in a rational sequence which permits client and worker to experience success and build confidence in abilities.

- Increased length of time in treatment

- Use of multidisciplinary team reviews for both assessment and treatment planning
- Use of outside consultation
- Follow-up contacts after termination of the case
- Paperwork kept up to date.

It is the responsibility of the supervisor to see that workers understand the operational consequences of these standards and follow them in planning and delivering services to clients. Unless this is done, it is unlikely that services will achieve their intended results.

A supervisor should aid child protective workers in interpreting agency standards and policies and ensuring that workers perform in a manner that conforms with those standards. It is true that certain agency policies, procedures or standard practices may seem to restrict the function of the CPS worker. When this occurs, the supervisor must either help workers to develop the means of abiding by the policy or procedure as specified or work within the agency to obtain changes in or exceptions to the disputed policies. Circumstances will determine which alternative the supervisor should choose.

One example of such a situation might be agency rules regarding hours to be worked. Restrictive hours may present a hardship to CPS workers who must be on call 24 hours each day and who find it necessary to make calls very late at night or early in the morning. In such an instance, it would be advantageous for the CPS supervisor to seek ways of monitoring the time the worker puts in so as to compensate the worker for extra time. This is just one type of situation where the supervisor must act as mediator between the worker and the prescribed structure. In this case, it would be helpful if the agency were flexible about child protective workers' schedules and about allowing for compensatory time or payment for overtime.

It is often difficult for the new supervisor, particularly if promoted from within, to accept and enforce the requirements of the prescribed structure. These requirements usually include reports, forms, statistical sheets, and recording formats. Very often new supervisors, in their "former life" as direct service workers, had criticized those very things as an intrusion or burden. Nonetheless, the administrative aspects of supervision are part of the position and cannot be overlooked.

Supervisors should recognize the necessity of administrative accountability and take steps to present these requirements in a positive manner. Further, supervisors are responsible for seeing that require-

ments are complied with, regardless of whether they agree with them. However, it is also the responsibility of supervisors to initiate change in policy if that is feasible and desirable.

If supervisors view this aspect of their role as a positive one, they will transmit the message that administrative requirements are necessary for case management and for smooth agency operations. In this case, staff will be more accepting of these requirements. This is particulary true if the methods developed to meet the requirements are generated by the staff themselves.

Establishing Standards for CPS Intervention

Definitions of child abuse and neglect seem to many to be both too broad and too narrow. It is difficult to draft legislation which is specific enough to prevent improper application and yet broad enough to cover situations of harm to a child necessitating CPS intervention.

As a result, there are many different approaches to defining "child abuse" and "child neglect." One approach is found in the Model Child Protective Services Act:

(a) "Child" means a person under the age of 18.

(b) An "abused or neglected child" means a child whose physical or mental health or welfare is harmed or threated with harm by the acts or omissions of the child's parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare.

(c) "Harm" to a child's health or welfare can occur when the parent or other person responsible for the child's welfare:

(i) Inflicts, or allows to be inflicted, upon the child, physical or mental injury, including injuries sustained as a result of excessive corporal punishment; or

(ii) Commits, or allows to be committed, against the child, a sexual offense, as defined by state law; or

(iii) Fails to supply the child with adequate food, clothing, shelter, education (as defined by state law), or health care, though financially able to do so or offered financial or other reasonable means to do so; for the purposes of this Act, "adequate health care" includes any medical or nonmedical health care permitted or authorized under state law; or

(iv) Abandons the child, as defined by state law; or

(v) Fails to provide the child with adequate care, supervision, or guardianship by specific acts or omissions of a similarly serious nature requiring the intervention of the child protective service or a court.

(d) "Threatened harm" means a substantial risk of harm.

(e) "A person responsible for a child's welfare" includes the child's parent; guardian; foster parent; an employee of a public or private residential home, institution or agency; or other person responsible for the child's welfare.

(f) "Physical injury" means death, disfigurement, or the impairment of any bodily organ.

(g) "Mental injury" means an injury to the intellectual or or psychological capacity of a child as evidenced by an observable and substantial impairment in the child's ability to function within a normal range of performance and behavior, with due regard to the child's culture.

Despite the various definitions available to the CPS worker, problems arise when it becomes necessary to decide exactly where (on a child care continuum extending from very good child care to extreme cases of child abuse and neglect) adequate child rearing stops and child abuse or neglect begins. This lack of a clear line between child maltreatment and "adequate" child rearing complicates the work of every professional who comes in contact with cases of abused or neglected children.

Because of this lack, CPS workers often develop their own perceptions of what actually constitutes adequate child rearing and of what

constitutes child abuse and neglect, based on their own experiences and models. CPS workers, particularly new ones, may feel extremely uncomfortable with this lack of specific knowledge and standards.

Effective supervisors are only able to assist these workers to the extent they are able to provide standards and guidelines for worker decision-making. The supervisor must be willing to risk articulating standards, even though they may prove imperfect. It is necessary for supervisors to have some degree of confidence in their own abilities to define and articulate standards for the worker while relying on agency policies as a guide and exploring and expanding their own knowledge base. They must have a clear picture of the standards which relate to good practice and be able to define, specify and clarify those standards in such a way that workers can both understand and use them.

Having determined some standards, the supervisor must be able to apply those standards in practice. CPS workers will often experience difficulty in making the hard decisions which must be made relatively quickly. While it is certainly unrealistic to expect the supervisor will have all the answers, workers must be assured that, when it becomes necessary, the supervisor can be counted on to help in making a decision.

Application of Standards to Specific Cases

Workers have the right to expect that their supervisor will have something to offer them when a specific question arises regarding the handling of an individual case. The potential consequences of casework decisions for individual children and their families make the role of technical advisor a crucial one for CPS supervisors, and they should have extensive experience in making this kind of decision. Thus supervisors should have experience in carrying a caseload.

But a CPS supervisor may not have had previous experience in working with child abuse and neglect cases. Those supervisors who do come to their positions without having worked directly with child abuse and neglect families must assume responsibility for familiarizing themselves with the specific and unique aspects of child abuse and neglect casework as quickly and as thoroughly as possible. Supervisors may acquaint themselves with child protective services through education, reading or directed study and staff interactions. New supervisors should also be willing to take advantage of the practical expertise of senior caseworkers, many of whom can prove to be excellent resources.

In order to provide effective supervision, supervisors should carry at least one child abuse or neglect case. Carrying a small caseload helps the supervisor to keep in touch with the real problems

of CPS workers. The major drawback of carrying a caseload is that supervisors are likely to be overburdened to the detriment either of their cases or their supervisory responsibilities.

Providing Standards on Ethical Issues and Values

The parent-child relationship has long been considered a priviledged and private one in this society. Therefore, supervisors need to come to terms with a number of relevant ethical issues. Part of the professional development of protective service workers includes the recognition and acceptance of their own beliefs with respect to the right of the child to protection. It also necessitates the development of an understanding of the ways in which those beliefs may influence their work performance. The supervisor must structure opportunities which will help to enunciate and clarify the worker's own ethics and values. In addition, the supervisor should help workers to learn when and how it is appropriate to apply their personal ethics and values in their role as a CPS worker.

Among the issues which must be considered are questions of confidentiality, use of authority, protection of the child, rights of the child, caretaker self-determination, caretaker rights and responsibilities, and the diversity of family life in America.

Confidentiality

All states now have some type of mandatory reporting statute for child abuse and neglect. In general, those statutes provide the opportunity for reporters to remain anonymous. While there is a possibility that this provision may encourage some people to misuse the law by making frivolous or "grudge" complaints, the law does affirm that in cases of suspected child abuse or neglect the rights of children take priority over the rights of an individual to confront an accuser. In fact, the usual procedure does not identify the reporter as an accuser, and those who report in good faith are protected from prosecution of suits.

Even unfounded reports of child abuse and neglect are potentially injurious to the reputation of the family. It is essential then that CPS agencies make every provision to ensure the privacy of case material. The CPS supervisor must be responsible for ensuring privacy for those families which are a part of the unit's caseload. This can be done in terms of periodic reminders to staff during staff meetings, and through a vigilant awareness of the activities and concerns of secretarial and clerical staff. The supervisor must also establish unit procedures with regard

to the storage of written case materials to ensure that all information remains in the office and inaccessible to anyone outside the unit, except in special situations, such as case presentations at multidisciplinary team meetings and court cases.

The CPS supervisor must take into account the multidisciplinary nature of the response system in child abuse and neglect cases. Although supervisors must protect the privacy and confidentiality of suspected abusive or neglecting families, they should provide appropriate information to other professionals in the response system who are designated to provide help to such families. For example, where cases are referred to other agencies, sharing information is essential for the effective coordination of services. The supervisor must always balance the issue of confidentiality against the necessity of providing help to families and children with abuse or neglect problems.

Client Self-Determination and CPS Responsibilities

Responsible persons in our society have the inherent right to choose the direction of their own lives. However, children are restricted in exercising this right; their parents are expected to assume the responsibility for doing this. In an abuse or neglect situation, the parents are not behaving responsibly. In order to ensure that abused and neglected children are protected and allowed to grow up to exercise their right to self-determination, it may at times be necessary to use the authority of the CPS unit or the authority of the court to tell parents how they must behave if they want to retain custody of their children. This exercise of authority seems, on the face of it, to directly contradict the value of self-determination, and is frequently a matter of considerable concern to workers.

Workers may signal their concerns about this apparent conflict in a variety of ways. They may have difficulty articulating the authority that is vested in them or distinguishing between their authority and the authority of the court. Some workers will deny their authority by declaring their total commitment to the wishes of the client. Some even try to deny their relationship to their own agency. Other workers will overreact to authority, becoming punitive and censorious. These workers often have difficulty responding to allegedly abusive adults except in the authoritative role, thus completely obscuring the individual's right to self-determination. Through these behaviors, workers are demonstrating their own inability to accept and to manage the authority which they do have.

The supervisor must have a clear understanding of how to balance these perspectives, both in terms of child protective services and in terms of supervisory responsibilities. Close attention must be paid to patterns of worker behavior, verbalizations, or written reports that may indicate lack of clarity about this issue or that the worker is responding inappropriately.

In exercising their authority to protect children, CPS workers may wish to ignore or circumvent the rights of parents. Although the primary responsibility of the CPS worker is to protect the children and then to rehabilitate families, it is essential to acknowledge the legal rights of the parents in this process. It is the supervisor's responsibility to help the worker make a proper balance between the two.

When a situation necessitates court action, CPS workers generally have strong convictions about what is necessary to protect a child. Workers may become frustrated when the legal system does not support their beliefs. Supervisors need to offer support and to encourage workers to work within, rather than in opposition to, the legal system.

The Diversity of Family Life in America

CPS workers must have not only a sense of how "normal" families function, but also an appreciation for the wide variations in family systems and structures. Families are extremely diverse, and what a worker sees as peculiar or unacceptable is not necessarily an indication of child abuse or neglect.

Supervisors need to have a clear understanding of what is important in family life. They must incorporate an awareness of the variations in family structure which occur in the various racial, ethnic, and cultural communities served by the CPS unit. Supervisors will need to convey an understanding of these cultural variations to child protective workers. Thus, supervisors can help workers to separate families with cultural variations in their lifestyles from families who are in actuality abusing or neglecting their children. For example, in some cultures younger children may be given a greater degree of responsibility in the family--they may be called upon to prepare dinner, or help with child care. This is not necessarily an indication of child maltreatment.

ORGANIZATION STRUCTURE IN A CPS UNIT

The components of CPS response process include: identification and reporting; intake and investigation; assessment and planning;

implementation of the plan, and termination and follow-up. Guidelines should be developed which establish criteria for initating the CPS response process. Intervention should occur in response to the full range of child maltreatment--physical abuse, neglect, emotional abuse, and sexual abuse and exploitation. The nature of the intervention in each case should be determined by the circumstances of the particular case. Intervention should be timely, limited to required procedures, and terminated when it is determined that continuation is unnecessary or when services are no longer required. The CPS supervisor has the responsibility for coordinating and assuring the implementation of required procedures in every reported case of child abuse and neglect.

In order to obtain this goal, the CPS supervisor must establish an organizational structure through which service delivery can be effected. Role specialization is an effective way of organizing a CPS unit. In this type of organizational structure, the unit can be divided into an intake and investigation section and a section responsible for implementing the service plan.

The intake and investigation section is responsible for receiving initial reports of suspected child abuse and neglect, for gathering the information necessary to corraborate or dismiss a report, and for making the initial assessment and service plan.

The case then would be referred to the case management or treatment section. The workers in this section would be responsible for implementing the service plan and termination. In the implementation of the plan, CPS workers would either provide direct services to clients or make referrals to another agency(ies) and monitor the case.

The experience of many CPS programs has shown that the total CPS delivery system can be made more effective if the CPS workers have specialized roles. Specialization has also provided increased job satisfaction and productivity among CPS workers. It also enables workers to move to different areas of specialization within the CPS response system when "burnout" or staff conflicts occur.

COORDINATION WITH A MULTIDISCIPLINARY TEAM

One of the most important functions of the supervisor in a CPS unit is to coordinate the efforts of the unit with those of other agencies and professionals in the community. Child maltreatment derives from a wide range of social and psychological problems that cannot be effectively managed by one discipline or one profession alone. Professionals such as social workers, physicians,

lawyers and teachers must work together if the cycle of abuse and neglect is to be broken. Optimal assessment and treatment efforts for child protective clients require the contributions and coordination of a broad range of professional and community agencies.

The supervisor can ensure coordination by being aware of other resources available in the community. In most cases, supervisors will have already established contacts with specific persons in other professional groups and community agencies with whom they can work together toward community coordination. Through their skills in coordinating, CPS supervisors assure provision of all types of needed services for the caretakers and children who are their clients and also prevent duplication of services and wasted effort.

Thus by establishing a multidisciplinary team which meets on a regular basis, CPS workers will be provided with additional support. Participation on this team can also help to enhance workers' professional growth.

PREVENTION

Efforts to prevent child abuse and neglect require a well coordinated community effort, an effective service delivery system, and appropriately focused attitudes and priorities within the community if they are to be successful. The CPS unit, as part of the child abuse and neglect response system, must be involved in steps for prevention.

CPS supervisors should be aware of the factors related to the prevention of child maltreatment and should take part in initiating and organizing prevention efforts in their community. Supervisors must also be supportive of the involvement of CPS staff in these efforts. For detailed information concerning the prevention of child maltreatment, supervisors can refer to another manual in this series entitled *Child Protective Services: A Guide for Workers.*

II

ROLE OF THE SUPERVISOR IN THE CPS RESPONSE SYSTEM

The supervisor plays a significant role in each of the following stages of the CPS response system:

- Intake/Investigation
- Assessment/Planning
- Implementation of the Plan
- Termination

The CPS supervisor should first provide guidelines for each stage in this process. For detailed information about the CPS response process, supervisors can refer to another manual in this series entitled *Child Protective Services: A Guide for Workers*. Once these guidelines have been established, the supervisor is responsible for providing guidance to workers in the decision-making process. The role of the supervisor will vary somewhat depending on the amount of experience the worker has, on the type of case, on the personality of the supervisor, and on the stage of the case in the response system.

Because workers function at different levels of competency, differing amounts of guidance and involvement are required of the supervisor. The complexity of a case also affects the extent of the supervisor's involvement. For example, little guidance is required if the case is fairly straight-forward.

Some supervisors prefer to be more closely involved in the decision-making process. However, it is important for the supervisor not to over-monitor workers' caseloads because this will take time from the supervisor's other responsibilities and prevent workers from developing effective service delivery skills.

The CPS supervisor will consistently have a more prominent role in the intake and investigative stage, including the provision of emergency services, and in the termination stage because these are the most critical decision-making points in the CPS process.

INTAKE

Before establishing the response system, CPS supervisors should determine standards for workers regarding acceptable and unacceptable child rearing practices (see Chapter I). It is important to remember that these standards should be based on state statutes.

The notion of "prevalent community standards" for child care, including concerns for racial, ethnic or cultural variations in community subgroups, is one attempt to delineate these standards. When workers confront the issue, however, "prevalent community standards" are often interpreted by them to mean those with which they are most comfortable personally, or those in the literature with which they are most familiar. The supervisor must navigate through the many conflicting processes available to establish intake standards which are compatible with the concerns of the community and the CPS unit.

Most agencies mandated to receive reports of child abuse and neglect are responsible for investigating all reports "made in good faith." However, if an agency is allowed to screen out reports, the CPS supervisor or agency should provide workers with guidelines specifying what kinds of cases do not warrant CPS involvement.

If possible, CPS supervisors should assign specific workers who specialize in receiving child abuse and neglect reports. The supervisor should provide training for the "intake" worker in the areas of: obtaining required information; differentiating between calls that are appropriate and those that are not appropriate for child protective services, and making critical judgments about the degree of urgency and initiating an appropriate response.

The establishment of statewide hotlines or central registers, which are responsible for the receipt of suspected child abuse and neglect reports 24 hours per day, adds additional responsibilities to the local CPS unit. Since, in most jurisdictions, CPS is responsible to investigate these reports, supervisors must make special staffing arrangements. It is preferable to assign "after work hours duty" on a rotating basis. Supervisors along with workers should share this responsibility. Supervisors should also be available for consultation to workers on "after work hours duty." During the time workers are performing this extra responsibility, CPS supervisors should allow them flexible day time hours.

INVESTIGATION

Conducting a child abuse and neglect investigation is one of the most difficult tasks a CPS worker must perform. It is preferable

to assign specific workers who specialize in investigating reports of suspected abuse and neglect, because it is extremely difficult to carry an on-going caseload and "respond immediately" to new reports. It is essential for supervisors to provide these workers with training in interviewing skills, gathering relevant information, provision of emergency services, and making a case decision.

CPS supervisors should help workers, first of all, to develop investigative techniques which would enable them to elicit the necessary information, while collecting observable data. While interviewing the family, workers will frequently experience parental resistance. It is the supervisor's role to provide guidance for dealing with this resistance. During the interview, workers must also use their social work skills to establish a relationship with the family. It is very important that CPS supervisors help workers combine these skills to enable them to gather information without alienating the family.

CPS supervisors must impress upon workers the need to collect collateral information concerning the family, such as medical or school records, in order to make an accurate case decision.

Provision of Emergency Services

The issue of risk or potential harm is paramount in CPS work because the primary task of child protective services is to protect the child. Ordinarily, risk is important primarily at the point of intake and investigation because when an abuse or neglect report is received there must be an initial assessment of level of risk to the child and a decision made regarding what to do with the child before any other steps are taken. Part of the supervisor's role in the assessment of risk to the child is to help the worker decide whether it is necessary to remove the child from the home, and under what circumstances the child can safely remain in the home. This is a very serious decision, and it requires careful consideration.

Details on situations which indicate that a child is in imminent danger are included in another manual in this series entitled *Child Protective Services: A Guide for Workers*.

Some workers need more guidance in assessing the risk to the child. Emergency placement of the child should only be considered as a last resort because of the serious disruption to the family unit and the emotional cost to the child. If removal of a child is necessary, the supervisor in the CPS unit should be involved in the process. Because the removal of a child is an intense emotional experience for the worker as well as for the family and the child, provision of emotional support for the worker is crucial.

Making a Case Decision

Establishment of specific guidelines as to what constitutes abuse and neglect facilitates making an investigative decision. Supervisors should monitor all investigative findings and case decisions. New workers will require more guidance at this stage because they lack experience and are not as confident as other workers.

Effective supervisors assist workers in improving their own abilities in making case decisions. This can be done by discussing with the worker the reasons for making a specific decision, assisting the worker in examining various available alternatives, and by offering support and encouragement.

Supervisors should specify a maximum time limit within which CPS workers determine whether there is probable cause to indicate that child abuse or neglect has been or is occurring. If nothing conclusive can be found to substantiate the report within 60 days, the case should be closed. Keeping it open any longer probably would constitute an invasion of the family's right to privacy.

Assessment and Planning

The assessment and service planning process begins at the investigative stage and continues throughout the treatment process.

There are two overriding functions CPS workers must be familiar with and fulfill in this process.

- Planning. This involves the social assessment process and establishment of the goals of the service plan.

- Organizing. This involves mapping out the services needed and the resources needed and available to provide these services. It also involves making sure that lines of responsibility are defined and that tasks are assigned.

In order for CPS workers to perform these functions, it is necessary for supervisors to provide training and guidance in each area. Although supervisors do not play as prominent a role in this stage of the CPS response process, it is essential that they help workers develop clearly stated goals and objectives in the service plan.

Supervisors should encourage workers to seek the advice of professionals in other disciplines as needed during the investigative process. Consultation with other professionals may occur informally or in conjunction with the multidisciplinary case consultation team.

IMPLEMENTING THE SERVICE PLAN

It is advisable to establish a section within the CPS unit which is responsible for implementing the service plan. However, these workers should have prior experience in investigating reports of child abuse and neglect.

The two functions CPS workers must be familiar with and fulfill in implementing the service plan are:

- Directing. This is a motivating function in which the worker maintains a supportive involvement with the client and the service provider throughout the total process.

- Coordinating. This involves monitoring the case to make sure that all services are being provided to meet the needs of the client, the provider, and the agency.

In this phase of the CPS process, supervisors should monitor whether the goals and objectives of the service plan are being achieved. It is important that workers assess these goals and objectives throughout the treatment process to determine if they should be changed, or if the case should be terminated.

Supervisors should encourage workers to utilize community resources to meet the needs of families experiencing child abuse and neglect problems. This is an essential step in the treatment process because many of the problems these families are experiencing can best be met by community agencies, such as mental health centers or public health departments.

When the service plan fails and there is continuing abuse and/or neglect detrimental to the health or emotional well-being of the child, the decision whether to remove the child from the home will again have to be faced. The determination of whether there is sufficient evidence to proceed with a formal complaint leading to a court hearing can be a difficult task for both worker and supervisor, and may require an evaluative discussion with court personnel.

TERMINATION/CLOSURE

Terminating services in child abuse or neglect cases is a difficult decision and should involve close participation and consultation with the worker's supervisor.

Unfortunately, there are situations in which a case is terminated without having provided services to the family. A decision to terminate a case without having provided services is usually based on

the fact that there is not a service available which is appropriate to the family's needs or no child maltreatment is present. A decision such as this should not be considered a rationalization but a reality when further involvement with the family will have no positive effect. It is absolutely imperative that there not be imminent danger to the child if the case is closed.

The decision to terminate a case which has received services should be based on evidence that the original problems causing the abuse/neglect have been resolved to the point that the family can protect the child. This emphasizes the need to keep accurate records of clearly defined goals and objectives. There also needs to be evidence that the family will voluntarily obtain assistance in the future if they face additional problems with childrearing. It does not necessarily mean that all problems have been resolved and that they will now live happily ever after. In some cases, the family may be reluctant to give up services, particularly if they are providing resources which the parents cannot easily obtain on their own.

In other cases, the family may be anxious to terminate before the changes that they have been trying to make during treatment have been fully achieved. Research has shown that there is a high rate of recidivism among abusive/neglectful families after services are terminated because the parents were not able to incorporate the changes into their daily lives. Families which regress after termination *appear* to have made changes which in fact were maintained only because there was continued involvement with professionals. The primary guide for termination should be the family's ability to seek outside support independently of the worker.

Many workers do not know how to terminate their involvement with their clients. It is the supervisor's responsibility to provide workers with general guidelines for termination. For specific information concerning guidelines for termination, supervisors can refer to another manual in this series entitled, *Child Protective Services: A Guide for Workers*.

PRIORITY SETTING

Helping workers to set priorities and organize their time so that they are maximally productive is a key supervisory task in any setting. In CPS programs, this task can be even more important, as a worker's priorities can affect the safety and well-being of many children and their families.

Of course, there will be a service plan established for each case handled by the CPS unit. However, cases will require different amounts of the workers' time depending on their complexity. Therefore, the supervisor needs to assist workers in setting two separate but interrelated kinds of priorities:

- What kinds of cases require the most immediate response?

- What kinds of cases should receive the bulk of the worker's time on a continuing basis?

The first factor to consider in setting priorities is the level of risk to the child. By definition all abused and neglected children are at risk. There are gradations of risk which determine the extent of the involvement of CPS workers. The CPS supervisor must help the worker to examine the factors which indicate the level of risk to the child. For information concerning the factors to consider in assessing the risk to the child, supervisors can refer to the manual in this series entitled *Child Protective Services: A Guide for Workers*.

Highest priority cases are those which present an imminent risk to the child. For example:

> . . . a six-month old child who has a skull fracture and several other fractures in different stages of healing. The parents' explanation of how the injuries occurred does not coincide with the actual injury.

This case would require not only an immediate response by the worker, but also a greater amount of involvement.

Lower priority cases would be those in which there is a lesser degree of risk to the child. For example:

> . . . a healthy eight-year old child does not attend school regularly, and when present at school she is physically dirty and wears torn clothing.

When the child is no longer in imminent danger, the level and kind of involvement by the worker is determined by the particular needs of the family.

THE CLIENT ISSUE

Supervisors must impress upon CPS workers that their primary focus should be the protection of children. However, the assessment, service planning, and treatment should consider the child's total environmental context. Treatment should be provided for parents and children and external supports must be developed for the family to ensure improved functioning.

III

SKILLS AND TECHNIQUES OF CPS SUPERVISION

Good supervisors are able to think and act responsibly, to work cooperatively with others and to provide workers with opportunities through which they can work together effectively and derive satisfaction within the group. These supervisors have the basic knowledge of social work theory, values, methods, and techniques. They also have the capacity to facilitate the professional and personal growth of their workers.

Effective methods of supervision are adapted to the individuality of each worker and to the group as a whole. Thus, good supervisors are able to identify workers' learning needs in relation to the job requirements and their professional experience. They use this information to develop training materials and appropriate teaching methods relative to the specific needs of workers.

There are a number of specific skills and techniques that are of special importance to a CPS supervisor. This section identifies some of them and describes how they can be used to increase supervisory effectiveness.

MODELING

CPS supervisors, like most other supervisors, are the most visible and accessible model for practice available to the CPS workers. By actions and words, supervisors can implicitly and explicitly establish the limits of permissible behavior. Further, modeling provides workers with nonthreatening opportunities to introduce new behaviors.

The basic question which the supervisor must ask is: "How do I want workers to relate to caretakers and children?" Despite the need to temper one's response according to different circumstances, there are some guidelines that can be established, based on protective service work ethics and the knowledge base that is available with respect to what constitutes good CPS practice. These guidelines indicate that good supervisor-worker relationships have the following characteristics, that will hopefully be carried over into the worker-client relationship.

- Cooperation and mutuality
- Explicitness and honesty

- Firmness and consistency
- Empathy
- Flexibility
- Participatory leadership.

Cooperation and Mutuality

Ideally, ideas, opinions, and solutions to problems should be contributed by both the supervisor and the worker. Supervisors who permit and encourage cooperation and mutuality with workers provide an effective model for these behavioral characteristics between worker and client.

This concept is particularly important since most CPS worker-client relationships are involuntary. Parents who become protective service clients often feel that the CPS worker is disrupting their privacy and that it is no one else's business how they raise their children. With the client-worker relationship starting off on this negative note, any cooperation and mutuality which can be achieved may help break down the threatened, defensive behaviors of clients, and help to initiate a more positive relationship.

Explicitness and Honesty

To the maximum extent possible, communication between supervisors and workers should be clear, unambiguous, and concrete. Above all, communications must be honest and frank. On occasion, workers and supervisors will withhold information or opinions from each other. For example, workers may withhold information regarding the nature of a specific report, believing that they are doing supervisors a favor by not burdening them all at once. In the same way, supervisors may decline to discuss certain questionable aspects of worker performance in the belief that such a discussion might undermine worker confidence.

While there may be times when discussion of certain issues would be inappropriate (e.g., it is bad timing to provide workers with a great deal of negative information just before a scheduled court appearance), supervisors should avoid withholding information or opinions indefinitely. Instead, supervisors must find the best way and the best time to address sensitive areas or concerns. The following are "standards" to work toward:

- Nothing is bad enough to hide; the question is not whether to bring up a topic, but when and how it is best to approach it.

- The supervisor is an honest person; the worker can trust the supervisor's responses.

- The supervisor has confidence in the worker's ability to handle sensitive situations.

Firmness and Consistency

Related to the ability to make decisions is the ability to see decisions through. This is not intended to imply rigidity, but rather to indicate the need for carrying out plans with some sense of continuity and stability. Clients need this from workers and workers need it from supervisors. If workers cannot have confidence in the supervisor's decision-making ability, they will be unable to extend any sense of commitment to their clients.

Empathy

The ability to feel what another is feeling--to walk in another's shoes--is a key concept in child protective work. In supervision, it may mean being able to feel a worker's sense of failure or sense of confidence at succeeding. Child protective work, after all, is people working together, and people experience a broad range of emotional responses. If workers perceive their supervisors' empathy and know how good it makes them feel, they can more readily extend it to clients who may never have had someone else demonstrate this kind of understanding.

Flexibility

Plans or decisions which do not prove to be effective or appropriate ought to be changed. It is important for supervisors to demonstrate in interactions with workers that plans can and should be changed, provided it is clear that the change is reasonable. This technique, in turn, should apply to the worker's dealings with clients. Flexibility on the supervisor's part permits the worker to learn two key lessons:

- It is permissible, even desirable, to admit making a mistake.

- It is permissible to change plans or approaches.

Participatory Leadership

The primary concern in this area relates to the need for CPS workers to feel some sense of control over their own lives, although they are aware of the supervisor's ultimate authority. Staff should be involved to whatever extent possible in case decisions and policy making, not just in trivial matters. The staff's advice should be solicited on matters concerning them and their work environment. Of primary importance, CPS workers should be given latitude to disagree with their supervisor and to formulate their own positions on policy and procedures based on the information available to them. The supervisor who interacts with workers in this way will model this behavior for workers, who in turn will be able to increase the capacities of clients to determine their own lives while protecting the rights of others.

WORKING WITH STAGES OF WORKER DEVELOPMENT

Identifying and Working With Stages of Worker Development

In most instances, CPS workers require at least a full year of work before being able to function on an independent level. For this reason, supervisors should anticipate devoting more time to workers during their first year of employment. At this early stage, it is essential to train workers in basic procedures, such as dictating case records immediately after the events occur. As workers develop, less constant and intensive supervision will be required. It is important to remember that workers who have previous social work experience and/or an MSW are likely to become acclimated to the CPS process more quickly than untrained workers. One way of looking at the development process is to identify various stages of worker development:

- First stage -- a period of high anxiety.
- Second stage -- make it or break it.
- Third stage -- good assessment skills, rudimentary intervention skills.
- Fourth stage -- relative independence.

In general, the amount of supervisory intervention into a worker's caseload will diminish as the worker passes through these various stages of development.

Stage One: The High Anxiety Stage

During the first three to six months on the job, exposure to abusive and neglectful families may result in a great deal of worker confusion. The worker will be searching for information on how to respond and examining personal feelings toward clients. If the supervisor has not effectively set standards, the worker may have a particularly difficult period initially and may feel inadequate to the tasks at hand. While this period is the most difficult for the worker, it is also the time in which the greatest amount of learning can take place. There are several types of interventions which the supervisor can employ to aid in this process.

Accept and meet worker dependency needs: During phase one, it is appropriate for the worker to seek security and stability from the supervisor. The supervisor can be somewhat more directive than might be appropriate with more experienced workers. Expectations regarding worker independence at this point are likely to be premature. Frequent reinforcement for positive worker behaviors, as well as the idea of unconditional caring, are key supervisory guidelines. Just as the supervisor accepts the dependency needs of the worker, the supervisor should encourage workers to accept dependency needs of their clients. This is a necessary and positive stage in the clients' treatment and is an effective way to use the worker.

Provide factual tools: The supervisor should provide new workers with whatever standards, priorities, and information are required to perform their work function. Workers should be assisted in recognizing how these standards and priorities relate to specific cases and to worker intervention. Inexperienced workers need as much structure and specific instruction as they can be given at this stage.

Accept the confused feelings of the worker: The confusion and sense of inadequacy felt by new workers should be viewed as a normal part of their development. If the workers can see that these feelings are acceptable to the supervisor, they will come to accept them in themselves and view them as a natural part of personal and professional development.

Allow workers to express anxitey: Undoubtedly the worker will be experiencing anxiety over performance and client interactions. These feelings must be elicited from the worker. The supervisor must help and encourage the worker to express this anxiety and provide the necessary acceptance and support to enable the worker to develop professionally. The supervisor also needs to help the worker sort out realistic anxiety feelings from unrealistic ones.

Constructively assist workers to identify mistakes: New workers do not always know when they make mistakes. They have not developed sufficient knowledge and skill to be able to identify gaps in their work performance, and the supervisor will need to assist them in doing so. This should always be done, however, by building on worker strengths and by discovering ways in which positive qualities can be applied to counteract shortcomings.

Pair new workers with experienced workers: A team system works well in a CPS unit. Pairing new workers with experienced ones provides a safety net and, in addition, shows new workers what they can aspire to.

Be regularly available for worker conferences: Beginning with this initial stage, and continuing through the next two stages of worker development, the supervisor should expect to spend approximately two hours per week with each new worker in individual conferences. In addition, crises and emergencies will arise which will also require time and effort on the part of the supervisor.

Substitute for workers only in cases of extreme emergency: Workers develop a sense of confidence in themselves and in their own skills by successfully handling emergencies. They need to know that the supervisor will support them and is available if really needed. The supervisor demonstrates confidence in the ability of the worker to handle emergencies by remaining in the background except for those times when intervention is absolutely necessary.

Build caseloads slowly: If possible, for the first month or two limit the number of cases a new worker must handle. This allows time for confidence building and reduces pressure.

Clarify client behaviors and worker behaviors: Questions asked during supervisor-worker conferences should be directed toward ways in which clients have responded to worker behavior. Conferences may also include clarification regarding the reasons clients have responded in this way. Focusing on both client and worker behaviors enables workers to be aware of which of their interventions are successful and which need to be changed.

Stage Two: The "Make It or Break It" Stage

At this level, workers have developed enough knowledge and skill to have some degree of confidence in making plans and decisions. However, they may still experience some anxiety and still have a limited ability to identify mistakes.

The supervisor needs to continue to encourage workers' independence while remaining available to provide a considerable amount of support. Interactions with workers at this stage should be characterized as follows:

Expect and allow some mistakes: Workers at this level will begin experimenting with new behaviors in working with clients, and will experience a crisis of confidence if these attempts fail to meet their personal standards. A worker who is beginning to take some risks and who is pressing to learn new things will inevitably make mistakes. The supervisor will need to expect this and to help the worker to accept it as well. If supervisors demonstrate a willingness to accept their own mistakes, they will, at the same time, show that making some mistakes is acceptable and should not be viewed as failure.

Introduce a greater degree of participatory leadership: During the first stage, the supervisor may have needed to be more directive in providing information to the worker. In this second stage, the supervisor should assume that workers have most of the necessary basic knowledge to perform their functions. The supervisor generally needs to help draw this knowledge out. This can be done by presenting alternatives that may not be evident to the worker.

Help workers organize observations and ideas: Workers will now begin to spontaneously identify patterns occurring in families and across caseloads. Similarities will be seen from one case to another. The supervisor should begin to underscore these similarities and permit the worker to synthesize them into some principles of practice.

Analyze intuitions without stifling creativity or spontaneity: As workers in this stage gain confidence, they will begin to operate on hunches, guesses, common sense, and intuition. While these may be more effective than the supervisor might initially suspect, supervisors should assist workers in validating their intuitions.

Stage Three: Mastery of Assessment Skills With Rudimentary Intervention Skills

At this stage, workers are generally able to identify and analyze errors; basic knowledge has been incorporated and gaps in casework are more apparent to them. Workers in the third phase begin to set personal and professionals goals and to identify times when their behavior is incompatible with these goals. This is the beginning of independent practice. During this stage, the supervisor can begin to allow the worker to take the initiative in the supervisory process.

Listen carefully: Careful listening is the primary task of the supervisory in relating to a worker at this level. Basic listening skills and the ability to identify not only what is said, but what is not said are important. The supervisor may ask clarifying or informational questions, but the function of the supervisor at this point is to listen first, then to talk.

Identify worker resistance and discuss it in relation to clients: While worker resistance may require some attention in earlier stages, it is at this third stage where the supervisor must be certain that any resistance is specifically addressed in supervisory conferences. When the worker is reluctant to deal with certain clients or client behaviors, these behaviors should be discussed specifically in terms of how they affect the relationship of the worker to the client. As in stage two, focusing on worker personality or specific worker characteristics out of the context of client relationships can be detrimental to both the development of the worker and of the worker-supervisor relationship. Attention should be directed to the way in which clients react to worker intervention, and the worker should be assisted in using personal and professional strengths in overcoming barriers and resistance in the worker-client relationship.

Help workers to identify and examine options: The first plans, intuitions, and perceptions of a worker on a case may or may not be the best way to proceed. While the supervisor may tend to agree with the options or ideas presented by the worker, it is essential to open up to the worker as many options as possible. This should be done in such a way that the worker may still come back to the first option if it is the best one. The very nature of the process of option exploration in and of itself will assist the worker in identifying options for other clients and in expanding the ability to work effectively with a variety of clients and cases.

Stage Four: Relative Independence

At this stage, workers can identify problems and options and generally can determine most of the agenda for supervisory conferences. Workers should have a good idea of what their own supervisory needs are and should have a sense of what is needed to promote further professional development. Supervisory conferences can be scheduled less frequently. The supervisory role at this point is more that of a consultant and colleague than that of an authority figure, although the CPS worker will always be subject to supervisory direction. The most critical supervisory function at this stage is to assist workers in clarifying their own professional development and in identifying learning needs. A serious mistake is made when the supervisor or the worker begins to assume that the ability to function independently and autonomously

somehow marks the end of the need for learning and growing. Failure of the worker to continue to learn and grow may well result in worker "burnout." The supervisor can assist the worker in identifying resources and opportunities for continuing education and development.

ENHANCEMENT OF WORKER SKILLS

Beyond the formal means of developing the professional capacities of staff, such as continuing education and establishing and encouraging the use of a unit or agency library, there are some general supervisory skills that, if used on a day-to-day basis, will lead to professional growth. The following material presents some guiding principles for this type of supervisory behavior. This material also identifies several stages of normal worker development that supervisors can use as a measure of the staff's current level of development. This schema can serve as a needs assessment tool for future developmental activities.

Some Guiding Principles

The wisdom of building case plans on the basis of client strengths is a widely accepted dictum of social work practice. As a corollary, it is true that effective supervision of workers builds on worker strengths. While each supervisor will develop special techniques for assisting caseworkers in taking advantage of the individual strengths which they bring to the job, there are a number of suggestions which may be useful to any supervisor in relating to workers.

- Give suggestions, not prescriptions. Workers should be assisted in identifying as many options as possible for dealing with a specific case problem, in analyzing these options in terms of the potential risks and benefits, and in selecting the "best" option based on the strengths of both the worker and the family.

- Note and acknowledge worker accomplishments. Supervisor-worker conferences should always include recognition from the supervisor for something which the worker, even the weakest one, has done well. Even during "slump" periods, each worker will be doing some tasks better than others. The worker's accomplishments should be pointed out, and the supervisor can then assist the worker in identifying ways in which the strengths evidenced by these accomplishments can be translated into problem-solving strategies in more difficult areas.

- Enable workers to assess and be responsible for personal learning needs. The supervisor should ask workers to assess their own learning needs and to assume responsibility for fulfilling them. Social workers generally acknowledge that clients probably will not change until they see a real need to do so. The same is true for workers. By encouraging the worker to identify those specific areas where improvement is needed, the supervisor can then be in a position to assist the worker in developing learning strategies for overcoming weaknesses. This is much more successful than if the supervisor sets a goal for the worker's development which the worker may not accept.

- Avoid the role of "therapist" to workers. The task of the supervisor is not to serve as therapist to workers with personal problems, but rather to focus on the workers' professional development. However, in situations where workers' personal problems affect their work performance, the supervisor needs to discuss them with the worker in a caring way.

- Don't carry cases by "remote control." Once in the field, the worker is responsible for the case although the supervisor should provide some basic guidelines for the worker. Trying to provide the worker with a set of detailed instructions on specific cases undermines worker self-confidence and conveys a general feeling of mistrust in worker ability to effectively handle the case.

- Supervise on the basis of worker skills as well as case needs. CPS workers have a variety of strengths and weaknesses and each worker functions at different levels of professional development. Supervisors should encourage workers to draw their own conclusions about cases. Suggestions for case plans should be offered only when needed. Workers should be encouraged to capitalize on their strengths and skills in making case decisions and implementing plans. Since workers function at different levels of competency, supervision should be geared to the workers' level of functioning.

- Enable workers to identify various stages of intervention. Child abuse and neglect cases sometimes become

so complex that they often seem overwhelming to the worker. In order to overcome this sense of futility, workers must be assisted in reducing cases to their component parts and viewing the intervention process as essentially a step-by-step procedure. Change should be viewed as occurring in increments, rather than all at once. When workers view a case in this way, they can help clients to assess their own progress on a step-by-step basis, thus making the entire process more amendable to success.

- Teach the worker individual case management techniques. Workers should be taught to focus on individual cases. It is necessary for workers to learn: how to formulate realistic goals and objectives, how to communicate them clearly and concisely in writing and to the family, how to implement the plan effectively, and how to assess whether the goals are being achieved.

- Prepare workers for supervision. A very important function for the supervisor is to prepare workers to be promoted to supervisory positions within the agency. Supervisors can do this by avoiding complete supervisory autonomy and by allowing workers to make their own decisions based on all relevant information available. The supervisor should also designate a senior worker who is responsible for supervision when the supervisor is absent from the unit.

DEVELOPMENT OF WORKER SUPPORTS

The ability of the supervisor to take advantage of good informal relationships among unit workers and others in the agency or in related agencies can be an important plus for unit functioning and effectiveness. Several skills can be useful in doing this.

Team Building

Part of the orientation which any new CPS worker receives is through informal interaction with other workers. The supervisor will need to build strong cooperative relationships among workers during this initiation phase through pairings of new workers with experienced ones to reduce the level of isolation and frustration which occurs in those inevitable situations where even the best worker may "fail."

Informal Discussions

A great deal of professional development of staff occurs in discussions over coffee or in other informal situations where workers consult with colleagues regarding specific case situations. If the supervisor encourages professional development during these informal periods, each staff member can serve as a resource for other staff members.

Peer Supervision

The supervisor should encourage discussion and review of cases among CPS workers, whether it occurs on a formal or informal basis. The supervisor can provide the type of atmosphere which promotes such feedback by not being too authoritative, and by allowing workers flexible time schedules to permit informal interaction or by allowing time for peer supervision at staff meetings. It is also helpful if the supervisor emphasizes to the workers the importance of positive as well as negative feedback.

Peer supervision is advantageous for several reasons. It is not as threatening to the worker's morale to have suggestions or constructive criticisms from a peer as it is if they come from the supervisor. Also, because all CPS workers are involved in the day-to-day process of protective service work, there will be a high degree of empathy and understanding among workers for each others' problems.

Staff Meetings and Case Staffings

Staff meetings in many CPS units are held only when an emergency arises or when a specific message must be conveyed to all workers. While these are legitimate functions for staff meetings, a far more important function is to provide an opportunity to air ideas and share new knowledge. By holding regularly scheduled staff meetings, perhaps every two weeks, the supervisor has a means of sharing important information on policy and procedural changes and relevant community events, and has the means to build internal team relationships essential to unit operation.

The supervisor should also structure scheduled case staffings which would provide workers with group support and input on case decision-making, positive feedback and alternative methods for case handling. Case staffings can also include discussion of cases which have been "border-line" or questionable at intake. These cases can be used as examples to develop intake standards for the unit. For example, the staff might discuss a series of cases where the common denominator

was a child left unattended. Using these cases as illustrations, the unit can address several key issues, including:

- How old must children be before they may be left unsupervised?
- What are the characteristics of the child who is left alone? How responsible is he/she?
- Is the child responsible for younger siblings? How old are they? Do they have any "special problems," i.e., are they hyperactive, etc.?
- What time periods are involved? Is the child left alone for long periods of time? Is the child left alone for 15 minutes after school? Is the child left alone in the middle of the night?

Although it is true that these cases will require decisions on a case-by-case basis, the supervisor in concert with workers can use staff meetings to attempt to set general guidelines for dealing with these problems. This approach may offer several advantages:

- Standards set as a group are less likely to reflect the bias of any single individual.
- The staff review process provides a forum for value clarification.
- The process can provide a model for demonstrating the value of cooperation and mutuality.
- The process builds consistency across workers.
- The process develops peer support for decision-making.

Interagency Forums

From time-to-time, the supervisor might arrange informal meetings with staff of other agencies and with professionals in related fields to provide opportunities to discuss mutual concerns and to share ideas. These meetings can also provide a valuable means of developing allies who can be useful when problems arise which must be dealt with through external channels. In addition, this is one way of lessening the staff's isolation and feelings of "us against them."

SPECIAL PROBLEMS IN CPS SUPERVISION

Regardless of how well the supervisor organizes and plans the workload, trains, and support the workers, and adheres to all administrative and accountability requirements, situations may arise which require special skills.

- Worker "burnout" is a significant problem in CPS units.
- Workers may prove to be clearly unsuitable for CPS work.

Worker Burnout

It is a well-known fact that staff turnover and other evidence of worker burnout is more common among CPS workers than among other social work professionals. The intense and emotionally draining nature of the work takes its toll on CPS workers.

"Burnout" is a catch phrase used to describe several sets of "symptoms" that may signal an individual's perception of failure. These signals, in general, can be discerned as a gradual and marked change in an employee's behavior and attitudes. The ordinarily caring and conscientious worker may begin missing appointments, taking a great deal of time off, and avoiding supervisory conferences. A worker known for using wisecracks or "gallows humor" as a means of defense may suddenly seem withdrawn and depressed.

The following vignette provides an example of worker burnout.

> Over the last few years Jean, a CPS worker, has become increasingly cynical about protective service clients. She is overly aware of their shortcomings. Because she can usually find some self-seeking motive behind clients' behavior, she avoids doing anything more than what the agency minimally requires. She feels her efforts will be futile anyway, since no one can accomplish much with that kind of person. Human tragedy is treated as a routine matter, and she is brusque and irritable. She follows the procedural manual religiously, and complains about the paperwork in which she buries herself. She frequently complains of fatigue and retreats regularly into sick leave.

Jean keeps from becoming frustrated by attempting to feel nothing, but this effort to feel nothing saps her energy. She thinks she has accomplished little so far and hopelessly anticipates an unending sequence of the same work with the same unsatisfactory results. Because she feels unappreciated by clients and administrators, she feels overly constrained in helping clients by a lack of community resources and mandated policies and procedures. Thus, her goal has become one of survival in her job until she is old enough to retire.

The worker's current attitudes and practices are an example of "professional burnout." Soldiers recognized the same symptoms as "battle-fatigue," and psychiatrists call them "emotional detachment" or "depression."

As with many maladies, the best cure for burnout is prevention. Unfortunately, it is one of the perversities of a bureaucratic setting that the people who work the hardest and care the most--the very ones who may be most vulnerable to burnout--are usually asked to do more, to take on the most difficult cases, and to act in special capacities that may cut into their own work time and build pressure, such as serving on committees or doing extra public speaking. Despite the seeming logic of such decisions, the supervisor must avoid overloading the staff.

In addition to frustrations stemming from caring too much and working too hard, burnout can be caused by doing the "same old thing" for long periods of time. Methods must be found to break the monotony of misery and dysfunction that workers must face in a CPS unit. The following basic techniques for good supervision are particularly effective for preventing worker burnout:

- Encourage staff to develop strong and close relationships with their fellow workers in order to reduce feelings of isolation and to develop networks of support.

- Award recognition or titles for a particularly good effort or accomplishment, e.g., worker of the week award.

- Spread opportunities to participate in special projects among all the staff. A special job or project in which a child protective worker is particularly inter-

ested may add new interest to the job. All workers have certain types of things they prefer to do and to which they are willing to devote extra effort. For example, some workers may enjoy giving presentations to the public while others prefer working with special volunteer programs.

- Encourage workers to participate in continuing education or create formal inhouse educational programs. For example, use one staff meeting a month as a seminar and bring in outside experts.

- Encourage workers to use their accumulated leave time throughout the year to periodically depressurize. (Many CPS workers accumulate compensatory time in addition to vacation time.)

- To the extent feasible, rotate tasks within the unit to prevent a build-up of "the same old thing" syndrome. For example, workers who are responsible for investigating reports of child maltreatment may be transferred to the section responsible for implementing the service plan.

If, despite these preventive measures and the availability of strong supervisory support, workers still begin showing signs of burnout, act quickly to confront the worker with the problem and to outline a course of action. Supervisors should also make every effort to examine the organization's structure and policies and their own supervisory activities to discern whether there are changes that can be made to prevent a recurrence or an expansion of the problem. This can be of particular importance if the burnout victim is a senior worker, as others may quickly pick up the negative signals.

If the supervisor provides this kind of supportive professional setting, incidents of worker burnout will be kept at a minimum. Some workers may still experience difficulties regarding the atmosphere or the pressures of protective service work. If this occurs even though the supervisor is doing as much as anyone can do to prevent or alleviate these problems, the supervisor will have to accept the situation and help the worker to seek a reasonable solution. The supervisor cannot be a therapist for the worker. At this point, workers will have to consider the difficulties they are experiencing and come to whatever decision seems most appropriate.

Coping With Incompetent or Unsuitable Workers

In general, there are two categories of worker behavior which will require immediate action: behaviors which are harmful to clients, and behaviors which consistently and clearly interfere with the effective functioning of the unit.

Behaviors that are harmful to clients generally consist of active behaviors, such as being openly critical of clients, which have a negative effect on clients or of continually neglecting to provide adequately for clients. Some workers begin to contribute more to client and case problems than they do to solutions. In these instances, worker intervention is more harmful than no intervention at all.

Workers' behaviors that interfere with the work of the unit are: resistance to work, criticism of other workers, continual anger, and disruptive behavior. In these instances, the total work of the unit is negatively affected, worker morale drops, and other management problems begin to emerge which interfere with the work of all members of the unit.

The following vignette presents an example of an unsuitable worker:

> When called upon, the worker speeds to the crisis scene. Last week he lectured a foster child about the value of keeping her room tidy, helped the sheriff chase a disturbed mother through a cornfield to bring about her psychiatric hospitalization, and testified in court against a father who had assaulted him when the mother had requested his assistance in settling a family agrument earlier that month. The worker claims he never has time to plan or work systematically with the clients toward goals because he is so busy putting out "brush fires" in his caseload. He tends to refer clients to other agencies when he cannot solve their problems immediately. Workers in community agencies are critical of his demanding attitude and inappropriate referrals which are often not accepted by the clients. His supervisor appreciates his enthusiasm and diligence but is concerned about his collecting so many troubled people who seldom move toward resolving their difficulties.

While there is no clear and definitive means of identifying unsuitable workers and while supervisors need to take care that workers are not unfairly singled out, there are a number of indicators which

can be helpful in determining whether or not a worker is actually unsuited for CPS work. (These guidelines should be applied in light of the worker's stage of development.)

Lack of ability to generalize: Workers who persist in viewing every case as individual and unique and who are unable to identify patterns or similarities in cases are likely to have to find solutions to the same types of cases over and over again. While families do, of course, have unique characteristics, many solutions or techniques can be applied to a range of cases, and effective workers will be able to note and apply these generalizations.

Lack of ability to individualize: At the other extreme from the worker who cannot generalize is the worker who sees every case as fitting into some predetermined set of categories or types. This worker believes that certain types of people exhibit certain types of behaviors and tends to exercise a series of biased or prejudiced judgments in almost every case. Another aspect of this inability to individualize is the worker who is unable to identify differences in character between people. Particularly in large families, this worker tends to see all children in the family as having identical sets of needs, problems, strengths, and weaknesses. This tendency can prevent the worker from developing an effective intervention plan to meet family needs.

Consistently poor performance with clients: A worker against whom clients are continually filing complaints may simply have a number of clients who like to project their problems onto the worker. However, a worker who seems to be distressful to a wide range of clients may, instead, be evidencing serious problems in work performance.

Resistance to work: Workers who are consistently late for work or scheduled meetings, who do not complete their work on time and who are lackadaisical about their responsibilities to their clients and staff will adversely affect unit morale. A worker who has been confronted about these behaviors but makes no effort to change them is most likely unsuitable for CPS work.

Consistently disruptive in unit meetings: Workers who are consistently cynical, sarcastic, or pessimistic, who belittle the work of others, or who present a clear attitude of superiority to other workers will seriously undermine unit morale. The worker who, having been made aware of these behaviors, continues to display disruptive characteristics in staff meetings or supervisory conferences and makes no effort to change these behaviors, may be unsuited for CPS work.

Consistent interpersonal problems: Some workers have persistent interpersonal problems. In some instances these are displayed as hostility or arrogance in relating to other workers or to the supervisor. In others, interpersonal problems may be evidenced by regular or chronic depression or withdrawal. Again, these behaviors may be indicative of a person who is not suited to the CPS environment, particularly when they are accompanied by an unwillingness or inability to change.

Rationalizing and projecting difficulty: Occasionally, a worker will develop or evidence patterns of rationalizing the difficulties they are having. They state that problems are not their fault, that the system is unfair, that clients are unresponsive, that resources are inadequate, etc. When these difficulties are projected onto others, the worker will make no real attempt to solve the problems either alone or with the help of the supervisor.

Any of these types of workers may appear in a CPS unit from time to time. The supervisor will need to determine the extent of the problem and decide whether the problem needs to be addressed directly. It is only when many of the problems occur in the same individual over a period of time that the supervisor will want to consider taking steps to terminate the worker's employment.

Difficulty in Removing An Unsuitable Worker

In most states, CPS workers are part of a civil service system, and specific procedures for hiring and firing are well-defined within that system. Each supervisor will need to be fully aware of the requirements within the individual state and agency and to conduct all activities within the legal limits of those requirements.

Many child protective service agencies have a built-in probation system or trial period so the worker and supervisor can see how well an individual will adjust to CPS work. If problems with the worker develop within that time period, it is much easier and more efficient for the supervisor to recommend that the worker change positions immediately rather than waiting until the probation period is over.

An underlying principle which applies in every situation and in every state, however, is that everything must be well-documented. The supervisor should maintain records on every instruction and expectation for every worker, and record the worker's response to that instruction or expectation. Verbal responses and specific actions should be noted with the record showing the precise response and describing the specific action to the maximum possible extent. Personnel files must, however, maintain objectivity, avoiding the conclusions and intuitions of the supervisor and recording only factual information.

Supervisors can take several steps in relating to workers who may be unsuited for CPS work:

- When workers evidence significant job related problems, the supervisor should discuss these problems with the workers. This discussion should be as specific as possible. For example, the worker has consistently not seen six of his/her cases, and complaints from other professionals about his/her curtness have been lodged against the worker.

- Another technique open to the supervisor is to reduce the unsuitable workers' caseloads and not give them further cases. This would enable the supervisor to more closely monitor the handling of individual cases. Supervisors should take care to use this technique judiciously. The unsuitable workers may enjoy their relief from responsibility and other workers may resent what they see as preferential treatment.

- If the worker continues to evidence problems in client relationships, a change in job responsibilities such as more in-office work is another alternative. Again, there is a potential danger in this method in that this may be just what the worker wants since it gets him/her "off the hook." However, if the employee performs well, supervisors will need to adjust workloads to free other workers for more field time.

The potential problems that can arise if an unsuitable worker continues in a unit for any length of time creates a sense of urgency with respect to this worker. It is imperative, therefore, to closely monitor and document worker behavior and progress from the beginning, and with each change in work assignment. For workers who develop into valuable assets to the unit, this process can provide valuable feedback. For those who may be unsuitable, this close scrutiny provides the supervisor with documentation which may be needed to dismiss the employee while still on probation. It may also provide the worker and supervisor with valuable information needed to "save" a questionable worker.

IV

CPS SUPERVISOR AS AN ADMINISTRATOR

Supervision is more than teaching, training and the provision of support; it has an administrative aspect as well. As an administrator, supervisors create the conditions and means for effective and efficient service delivery.

Administration, accountability and recordkeeping are terms which are used interchangeably in social services agencies. Previous sections have already identified the part that organizational accountability plays in defining the supervisory role. The purpose of this section is to focus on these areas as they relate to practice in a CPS unit specifically, and to identify some skills and techniques that supervisors can use to effectively fulfill that part of their role.

ADMINISTRATION

In terms of supervisory functions in CPS, it may be most helpful to focus on administrative skills as they relate to management of the work flow and to the effective use of time. Planning of work flow and of staff time becomes particularly critical in CPS in the light of caseloads which are usually too large. There are a number of techniques that can be used to perform administrative functions and to assist workers in planning and managing their individual caseloads.

- Set up a work plan. Establishing a basic plan for completing work assignments should be done on a daily, weekly or monthly basis by the supervisor. The supervisor should encourage workers to do the same by providing a simple calendar form on which workers would schedule weekly appointments with clients, meetings and time spent in the office. The supervisor's plan will provide a certain order of organization for the work and a basis for self-evaluation in terms of how much work has been accomplished and what still needs to be done. In the same way, the supervisor can use worker plans to assess performance.

  There is a direct relationship between the way a supervisor uses time and the way the workers' time use habits develop. In many instances, the

inability of a supervisor to help a worker manage caseloads and time is directly related to the supervisor's own ineffectiveness in the same areas. The mandatory planning of calendars by workers can provide the necessary structure to help them develop good habits regarding time usage.

- Division of labor. Both supervisors and workers will encounter a number of seemingly essential activities which can be delegated to others without any negative effects on the unit or the clients. Many tasks can be accomplished by technical, clerical or volunteer staff.

  For example, volunteers can be used to transport clients to medical appointments, counseling or therapy sessions or for other support activities. Clerical staff can partially, or totally, complete many forms and workers can then check them for accuracy in a relatively short time.

- Do long-term tasks before starting short-term tasks. In CPS work particularly, emergencies come so frequently that postponing long-term tasks until there is time to do them may well result in those tasks remaining undone. It is frequently easier, and generally more effective, to "sandwich in" short-term tasks to use them as breaks in routine--rather than to try to get all of the short-term tasks out of the way to "make time" for the longer term tasks.

- Allow for the unexpected. It is generally true that if anything can go wrong it probably will. Time and work should be organized in such a way as to allow for crises, emergencies, administrative requirements for new information, and other demands for time which must be met. Also, if at all possible, workers should try to be available for family members who need to talk to them.

- Control interruptions. While this may seem to contradict allowing for the unexpected, it is essential that the supervisor devise some means for workers to have periods of work time, probably in the office, when they can work without interference from telephones, visitors, or any

other types of interruptions. Of course, exceptions may be required for emergencies but a certain amount of control is essential.

- Do the least interesting tasks when energy level is highest. Each individual needs to determine the time of the day in which they are able to do the greatest amount of work. For some this may be early morning, for others late in the afternoon or in the evening. If this time is used for the most interesting tasks, there is a good possibility that less interesting tasks will never be completed.

- Group similar tasks. Tasks, such as completing a series of telephone calls or filling out a number of routine forms, can often be grouped and completed in one block of time. This allows the worker or supervisor to develop a kind of psychological "rhythm" for these tasks which can often result in more being done in a shorter period. Also, the worker should be taught to plan the work day with locations in mind so large amounts of time will not be wasted in traveling back and forth.

- Use dictating equipment or tape recorders. When an appropriate amount of clerical support is available, teaching workers to use dictating equipment can cut report preparation and other writing time at least in half. Even if this type of support is not available, the use of a small tape recorder can facilitate report preparation by allowing the worker to record essential data, reiterate specifics of client conversations, and summarize other information while his/her memory of events is still fresh. Some workers, for example, are able to record basic data on a client visit while driving to another client's home. By using this method, the worker avoids the confusion of trying to sort out two or three different conversations later and also avoids the delays which might occur if each visit had to be written up before another could be made.

- Set time limits and plan agendas for meetings. Always establish an agenda for meetings and staff conferences; even if it is not written out it will help to focus the meeting. At the beginning of any meeting, whether a staff meeting or a supervisory conference, it is generally possible to estimate an adjournment time. Establishing this time limit at the beginning of the meeting will tend to focus the discussion toward completing the necessary work.

- Allow time each day for desk clearing and making a list for the next day. Taking a few minutes each day to summarize priority efforts for the next day will enable both the worker and the supervisor to focus work efforts quickly each day and move toward the accomplishment of essential tasks. This time, if well used, will also help avoid missed appointments and allow time for emergencies. To accomplish this, it is usually best not to schedule out-of-office appointments for the last part of the day.

ACCOUNTABILITY

Activities oriented toward accountability are often viewed as unrelated to providing services to clients. "Paperwork" tends to be viewed as a bureaucratic barrier to getting work done rather than as a means for organizing and accomplishing that work. Supervisors need to stress the ways that completion of accountability tasks can benefit the unit and the individual worker. Even if the work is something which "must be done," it is generally possible to turn these required tasks into assets rather than liabilities. Accountability tools can often be used to assist workers in work organization and planning, and completion of forms and other paperwork can generally be directly related to work performance.

Give Feedback to Workers on How Accountability Is Useful

Supervisors need to find ways of using accountability reports within the unit. Often written information can focus work on a case, assist the worker to identify progress, and provide valuable input for planning casework in incremental steps.

Use Forms As a Means of Evaluation

Evaluation is a neutral term; it can be either positive or negative. From the positive perspective, forms are useful in assisting the effectiveness and efficiency of the program. The following are questions that need to be addressed:

- Effectiveness -- How well is the agency doing what it is supposed to do? How well is the worker performing essential tasks?
- Efficiency -- Are workers performing to full capacity? Are there less time-consuming ways of accomplishing the same amount of actual work?
- Consumer (Client) Satisfaction -- Did the client receive the necessary service(s) and was it satisfactory?

Although these questions are not all inclusive, answering them satisfactorily can result in improved worker and agency performance. To the extent that the supervisor is able to demonstrate to the worker how accountability procedures assist in answering these questions, it is possible to demonstrate the relevance of the use of the forms and procedures.

Conduct Training on Use of Forms and Emphasize Similarities and Value

Often different forms which are required in CPS work ask for similar types of information. When these similarities are pointed out to the worker, completing the forms actually becomes easier. It is also possible to train clerical staff or volunteers to complete most forms, in whole or in part.

Many supervisors make the mistake of belittling the use of forms. This simply increases worker resistance to the forms and contributes to the lethargy and "mindlessness" associated with this activity, with the end result of increasing worker frustration and dissatisfaction.

RECORDKEEPING

Accurate and complete recordkeeping is, of course, an important element of accountability. It also can provide guidance to both the worker and the supervisor in assessing case progress and identifying

alternatives for case planning and management. Should it become necessary to go to court on a particular case, a completed record is an invaluable tool for documenting the need for specific court action.

Emphasize the Importance of Complete Records

As with all procedures related to accountability, it is important for the supervisor to emphasize the benefits of complete and accurate case records. Too often, dictation or writing on case records falls far behind the actual casework and is given a relatively low priority in terms of allocation of time. Incomplete records or records which are not up-to-date can present major problems to an agency, particularly when workers are transferred or leave the agency, when caseloads require redistribution, or when emergencies arise on a particular case and the primary worker is not available to handle the crisis. It is essential that the CPS worker be encouraged to keep records as near to the time that events occur as possible.

Use of Records in Case Management

It is essential that CPS workers complete a social assessment of the family, a service plan which has clearly defined goals and objectives and the method of implementing the plan. Keeping accurate and up-to-date records enables workers and supervisor to assess case progress, amend the service plan if necessary and determine if termination is appropriate.

Review of Case Records

Since accurate recordkeeping is crucial to effective case management, supervisors should continually review case records. There are several ways supervisors can guarantee periodic reviews of every case. For example, the supervisor can designate specific cases for review prior to every supervisory conference.

The supervisor should then review the specified case records prior to the conference with the worker. Through this process, the supervisor can determine whether:

- dictation is up-to-date
- all relevant forms are included and complete
- workers are maintaining contact with the family
- cases are being handled appropriately

Consistent review of case records is essential to effective supervision and service delivery.

Using Official Records in Court

Perhaps the point at which accurate, complete and up-to-date records are the most crucial is when a case must be taken to juvenile or family court. Complete and accurate case records are indispensable when caseworkers are required to present cases in court, when they must testify in court, or when an attorney or prosecutor must make a determination regarding whether or not court is a viable option.

All cases should be maintained in such a way as to provide a record which could be used in court. Even in those cases which may not require any immediate court action, the need for court intervention may occur at some point in the future and the entire case record will be needed to prepare testimony.

In the court itself, records can be used in two ways:

- Worker notes on a case can be used as aids to worker memory. By using notes, workers can be more specific, concrete and confident in their testimony. This will add immeasurably to the effect of the testimony on the case itself.

- In many states, case records can be introduced as evidence in a juvenile/family court proceeding.

Organization of Case Records

Standard organization of materials within each case record is important to allow for easy access to information. It is also essential that CPS workers clearly designate facts from conclusions and opinions. Case records might be organized in the following sections:

- Intake information

- Initial investigation and case decision

- Social assessment, including: a medical and psychological evaluation, a family history, collateral information

- Service plan, including referral agreements, etc.

- Records of contacts and on-going case management

- Court intervention, including court orders
- Correspondence
- Case termination.

APPENDIX

SUPERVISOR'S SELF-CHECKLIST

The following are questions the supervisor can ask himself/herself to determine whether they are supervising effectively:

1. Do workers continually come to me with procedural questions?

2. Do workers continually come to me with case specific questions as to whether particular situations constitute child abuse/neglect?

3. Do workers continually complain about excessive paperwork?

4. Do workers complete paperwork and forms on time?

5. Are workers' case records up-to-date, complete, and accurate?

6. Do workers' case files follow the standardized format?

7. Do workers freely express ideas and opinions concerning decisions affecting the unit?

8. Do workers communicate openly and honestly?

9. Do workers come to me when they need assistance with a case decision?

10. Do workers admit to making mistakes, and are they able to change plans mid-stream?

11. Do new workers seek security from me?

12. After 3 to 6 months of employment, are workers able to generalize patterns across families?

13. After approximately 6-12 months, are workers able to identify problems and alternatives and are they aware of their supervisory needs?

14. Do workers come to me and each other for support?

15. Do workers complain that I expect either too much or too little of them?

16. Do I allow workers to come to their own conclusions or do I dictate solutions?

17. Are workers able to formulate realistic goals and objectives for their clients?

18. Are workers able to coordinate services effectively with other community resources?

19. Are clients being helped?

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